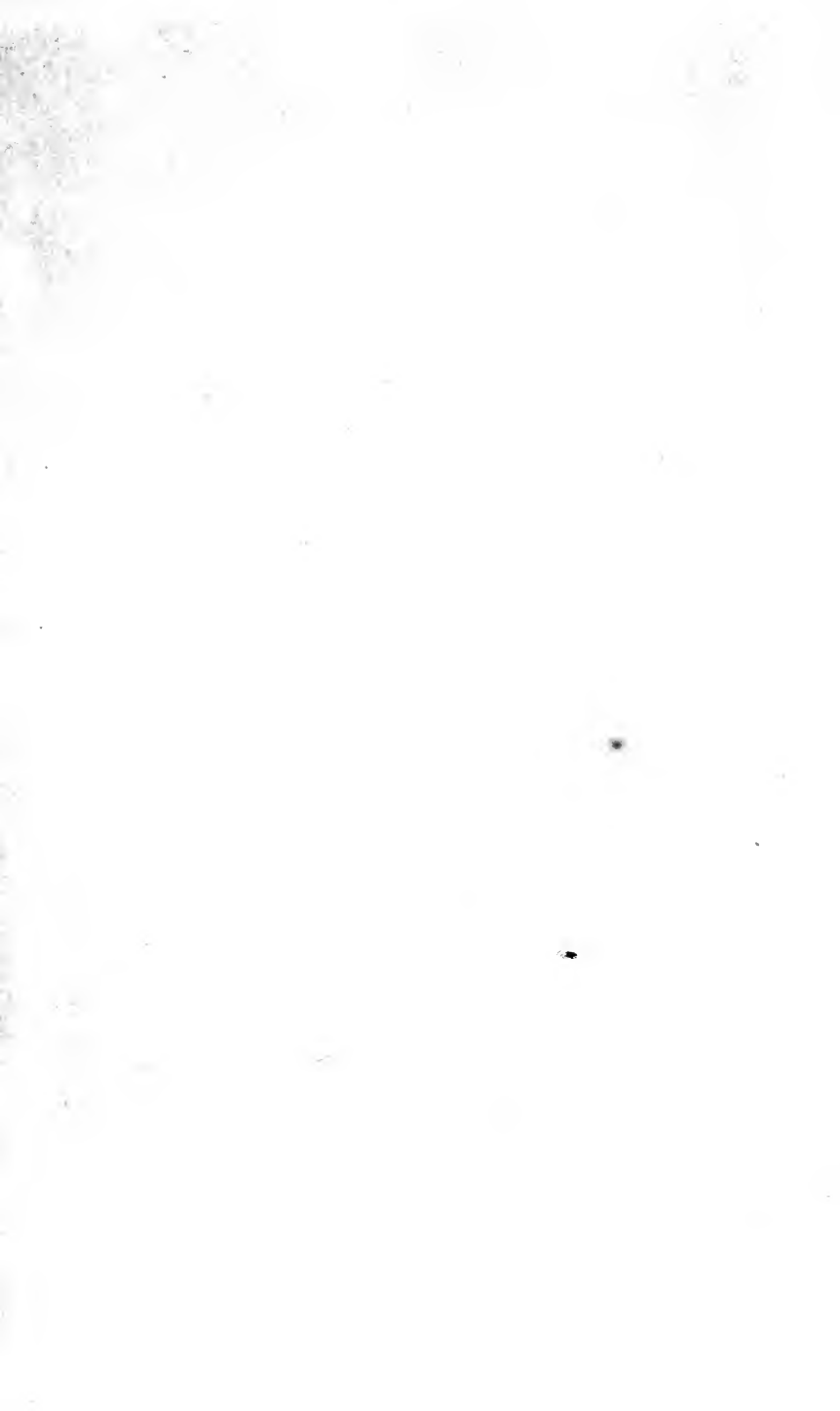






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THE
GOVERNMENT POLICY
WITH RESPECT TO
AFGHANISTAN,

BY
J. D. M.

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THE
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No part of the Foreign Policy of the Government has been more persistently assailed than its dealings with Afghanistan. We are told that these commenced with a crime and ended with a blunder ; that we made an unjustifiable war upon Shere Ali Khan for the purpose of forcing him to receive an embassy, and of securing to ourselves a scientific frontier ; that our Ambassador has been murdered, and our frontier is insecure ; that we asserted a wish to make Afghanistan friendly and independent, and that we have succeeded in breaking it up into fragments, which are hostile to each other and to ourselves ; that our true policy was to preserve the Afghans as a barrier between ourselves and Russia, and that the result of our conduct will be to obliterate Afghanistan, and to bring our own frontier in contact with that of Russia. Finally, we are told that we were warned beforehand of the very dangers and difficulties which have happened, but that we chose wantonly to encounter them by abandoning the old Whig policy which had preserved us in security and peace.

Now I think it will be found that the whole of this argument rests upon the not uncommon fallacy of criticizing the course which has been taken without enquiring into the reasons which made it necessary ; of magnifying the undoubted dangers and difficulties which have arisen from adopting that course, and ignoring the still greater dangers and difficulties which

would have arisen from adopting any other course; of assuming that peace and security are the same thing, and that the best way of avoiding a contest with a burglar is to remain quietly in bed while he is breaking open the hall door. My object will be to show that the position of affairs in the end of 1878 left the Government absolutely no alternative except to make war upon the Amir of Afghanistan; that if everything which has occurred could have been foreseen, it would still have been necessary to follow exactly the same course; that if that course has been forced upon us by previous mistakes, those mistakes were committed by Mr. Gladstone's Government; and that the policy which we are told we ought to have followed is simply the old Whig policy, which consists, first in doing nothing until it is too late, and then in doing nothing because it is too late.

The whole reasoning on the other side rests upon a persistent refusal to recognize the Russian element in the case. If this is excluded, the argument against the policy of the Government would be unanswerable. So long as we had only to do with Afghanistan, no human being would wish to establish an Embassy at Cabul; or would care whether the frontier which separated the British Empire in India from five nations of savages was scientific or unscientific. But it became a very different question when we had to consider whether we should allow these millions of savages to be drilled, disciplined, armed and organized by Russia, and whether we should allow the mountain passes on our own borders to be converted into an impregnable outwork of the Muscovite Empire. To that question only one answer is possible, and that is the answer which it received from the Conservative Government. What I want to show is, that that was the question, and the only question. Further, that the crisis which occurred in 1878 was one to which Russian policy had been steadily advancing for three-quarters of a century, which must have come sooner or later, and which, whenever it did come, must have been met, once for all, either by resistance or surrender.



For upwards of a hundred years, Russian ambition has aimed at two objects—Constantinople and India. The former object was almost attained in the spring of 1878, when Russian troops stood before the gates of Constantinople. They themselves admit that it was the resistance of the English Government alone which prevented their entering those gates. What progress they have made towards the second object may be best judged from this simple fact. In the beginning of this century the frontiers of Russia and British India were divided from each other by a distance of 2,000 miles. That distance has now been reduced to 350. The history of this progress is that which is known as the question of Central Asia. No one can offer an intelligent opinion upon Afghan policy who does not understand this history.

Central Asia may be roughly described as that portion of Asia which lies between Afghanistan and Siberia. In the centre of this great tract of country is the Sea of Aral. The larger part of this region is a sandy desert; but two immense rivers which take their rise in the mountains to the north of India, flow into the Sea of Aral, and are bordered by fertile kingdoms. The eastern of these rivers is the Sir Daria or Jaxartes; the westward is the Amu Daria or Oxus. To the right of this region is the Chinese Empire, while Persia and the Caspian Sea stretch away on the left hand to the borders of Russia.

Now it is evident that there are two ways by which Russia can approach India; from the west, in the direction of the Caspian Sea, or from the north, by ascending the rivers which empty themselves into the Sea of Aral. Accordingly a steady process of conquest has been going on in each direction.

The first advances were made on the side of Persia. A war which ended in 1813 gave Russia possession of the greater part of the western coast of the Caspian, and by successive gains from Persia, Circassia, and Turkey, an uninterrupted mass of Russian territory now extends from the Black Sea to the Caspian. Russian troops cannot, however, march round the southern coast of the Caspian, as it is still in the hands of Persia. So another war,

which ended in 1828, gave Russia the exclusive right of maintaining ships of war on the Caspian; and thereby of turning it into a Russian ferry. In 1838 she established a naval arsenal on the Persian island of Ashurada, on the south east corner of the Caspian, and she has since then crossed over to the eastern coast and set up forts at Tchikislar and Krasnovodsk, which are again the starting points for further aggressions. During the last few years an annual expedition has set out in the direction of India, and moved along the northern frontier of Persia, securing its progress as it went by building new forts. This process, however, is subject to the drawback that the country is bare and difficult, and that the Turkomans who inhabit it are numerous and warlike. Accordingly suggestions have recently been thrown out that Persia should be induced to cede to Russia a strip of territory bordering upon the desert. If this arrangement was made, the army of the Caucasus could advance to the very border of Afghanistan without leaving Russian soil.

The advance from the North is more recent and more rapid. It commenced in 1847, and with some short pauses, caused by the Crimean War and the Polish Rebellion, it has continued to the present day. The first step was to connect the Sea of Aral with Siberia by a line of forts. Then the Russians steadily advanced up the eastern river, the Jaxartes, annexing the countries which it watered, and then crossed over to the western river, the Oxus, repeating the same process along its banks. In this way the whole of Khokand and the greater part of Bokhara and Khiva have become absolutely Russian, while the Khans of Bokhara and Khiva, who are still allowed to exist, are simply Russian vassals, and their territory is for all practical purposes at the disposal of the Czar. In this manner, as I have already said, the nearest point of Muscovite dominion is not more than 350 miles from our frontier town of Peshawur, while the intervening region belongs to Bokhara, and is really Russian under another name.

It may be that these proceedings were not commenced with any deliberate view to the conquest of India, but it is quite certain that they will never end till they reach India, or a point

at which further progress is made impossible. Every step in the march has been described by the Foreign Office at St. Petersburg as either temporary or involuntary, but still the march goes on. When Ashurada was occupied, permission was asked to take possession of it for a temporary purpose, but it has never been given up. When the Russians had advanced in 1864 up the Jaxartes as far as Khokand, Prince Gortschakoff sat down and wrote a circular, full of the noblest sentiments of Christian moderation, in which he pointed out that Russia had now reached the limits of her conquests, and that for the future Central Asia was to be at rest. The very next year a fresh attack was made upon Khokand, half of the Khanate was seized at once, and the whole was annexed in 1876. Then came the town of Bokhara, whose capital, Samarcand, was taken in 1868. For two years we were assured by the Russian Emperor himself that his earnest desire was to restore it, but it never has been restored. In 1872, the Khivan expedition was determined on and organized, and in the next year it was carried out. Much anxiety was felt in England at this further advance, which would place Russia in command of the Oxus, which extends up to our very frontier.* Repeated denials of any intention to attack Khiva had been offered until the very year before the attack was made. Then a special envoy, Count Schouvaloff, was sent over for the purpose of comforting our Foreign Minister, and keeping Parliament quiet. He was directed to admit the expedition, but to represent it as something of a perfectly insignificant and ephemeral character. It was to consist of $4\frac{1}{2}$ battalions, and "not only was it far from the intention of the Emperor to take possession of Khiva, but positive orders had been prepared to prevent it, and directions given that the conditions imposed should be such as could not in any way lead to a prolonged occupation of Khiva." The expedition of $4\frac{1}{2}$ battalions turned out to be five expeditions, numbering about 13,000 men. The actual treaty ceded to Russia all the territory of Khiva on the right bank of the Oxus, with the exclusive right of navigating that river, while an impossible indemnity and other terms

placed the Khan of Khiva absolutely at the mercy of Russia. No one doubts that both Khiva and Bokhara will follow the fate of Khokand, whenever it becomes convenient to take them. On every occasion the course of events has been exactly the same. Each fresh advance has brought the Russians in contact with a new horde of Turkomans. A Russian subject is killed, or a Russian camel is carried off; and then a fresh expedition is organized which results in fresh decorations to the commanding officer and new accessions of territory to the Czar. It is not necessary to impute any moral blame to the Russians in the matter. The sequence of events may be quite unavoidable. But if it is unavoidable that England and Russia should meet on the frontiers of India, this is all the better reason why we should take care not to be taken at a disadvantage when the inevitable moment arrives.

It is now time to show how this slow but steady march of the Muscovite towards our Indian Empire is mixed up with the recent events in Afghanistan.

About ten years ago the advance of Russia through Central Asia caused much uneasiness in the minds of English statesmen, and it was suggested that a neutral zone should be established, which should permanently separate the two nations. This scheme was found to be impracticable. On the 24th February, 1869, however Prince Gortschakoff instructed the Russian Ambassador in London, to "repeat to Her Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of State the positive assurance that His Imperial Majesty looks upon Afghanistan as completely outside the sphere within which Russia may be called on to exercise her influence. No intervention or interference whatever, opposed to the independence of that State enters into his intentions." On the 2nd November, 1869, Prince Gortschakoff himself said to our Ambassador "with respect to the inexpediency of either English or Russian officers going to Afghanistan, that he saw no objection to English officers visiting Cabul, though he agreed with Lord Mayo that Russian agents should not do so." In consequence of this] understanding an examination was made of the northern boundary of Afghanistan, and it was agreed between England

and Russia that it should be considered as extending to a specified point on the Oxus. The whole of these negotiations were communicated to the Government of India, and reviewed by them in a despatch dated the 30th June, 1873, which was in turn communicated to the Russian Foreign Office. It stated plainly that "the complete independence of Afghanistan is so important to the interests of British India that the Government of India could not look upon an attack upon Afghanistan with indifference." It then went on to say, "The assurances given by the Russian Government of their determination not to interfere with Afghanistan have been clear and positive throughout the whole course of these negotiations. We unreservedly accept those assurances, and we are satisfied that this frank explanation of the position of the Government of India as regards Afghanistan will not be misinterpreted."

It was obviously of essential importance that we should strongly attach the ruler of Afghanistan to our interests. The first step towards this object was taken by Lord Mayo in 1869.

Shere Ali Khan came to the throne in 1863; and for five years was engaged in a series of conflicts with his brother, in which he was alternately victor and vanquished, a Sovereign and a fugitive. During the whole of these contests Sir John Lawrence, the then Viceroy, maintained an attitude of cold neutrality, recognizing each brother in succession with polite impartiality, as the wheel of fortune revolved. Finally, Shere Ali established his position beyond dispute; and in March, 1869, a conference took place between the Ameer and the new Viceroy, Lord Mayo, at Umballah.

On this occasion Shere Ali appears to have been under no apprehensions from abroad. His only fear was of a renewal of civil war within his own dominions; and he strove earnestly to secure an express treaty binding the Indian Government to assist him unconditionally against such an event. This Lord Mayo refused to do; but he gave him handsome presents of arms and money, with a promise of more; and he wrote him an official letter, in which he announced that the Government of India would view with severe displeasure any attempt on the part of his rivals to

disturb his position as ruler of Cabul, and to rekindle civil war. This was much less than Shere Ali wanted ; but it was a good deal. The frank and genial manner and manly presence of Lord Mayo had an extraordinary effect upon his mind ; and it is admitted on all hands that he went away contented happy, and loyally attached to British interests.

It is remarkable, however, as bearing upon what afterwards happened, that the Duke of Argyll, the then Secretary of State for India, showed much dissatisfaction with Lord Mayo for even the cautious and qualified promises which he had made to the Ameer, and regretted that he had not coupled them with provisoes which would undoubtedly have deprived them of all value in Shere Ali's eyes.

Up to this time India and Afghanistan had been left to themselves, and no cause of difference had sprung up between them. In the very next year, however, the cold shadow of the great northern giant began to fall upon Cabul. From that year the influence of Russia began to make itself felt. In 1870, notwithstanding the express promise of Russia to consider Afghanistan as beyond the sphere of her influence, General Kauffmann, the Governor-General of Turkestan, began to address a series of letters to Shere Ali. In form they were innocent enough. They contained elaborate accounts of the dealings of Russia with her neighbours in Asia, dealings not in themselves very reassuring, coupled with numerous protestations of love and respect for Afghanistan ; while these again were interspersed with gentle hints that the existing state of harmony depended a good deal upon the sentiments which Shere Ali might evidence towards his patronizing correspondent. In short, they might all be summarised in this way, "I am getting everyone round me comfortably under my thumb. Be a good quiet Amir, and perhaps your turn won't come." This was the view Shere Ali took of the correspondence. With Oriental acuteness he read the unwritten words between the lines of his great friend's letters. He forwarded them to the Government of India, and asked anxiously what they meant. He remarked that in one letter Bokhara was spoken of as intervening between Russia and

Afghanistan, while in another letter Bokhara had mysteriously disappeared, and Russia was said to be the neighbour of Afghanistan. He observed that the Governor General took the trouble to inform him that his instructions were to avoid all interference with or annoyance to his neighbours ; but that somehow or other the Russians had managed to wipe out every neighbour with whom they had come in contact. He pointed out the numerous grounds of difference between himself and the Governor-General which might arise, and sought nervously for advice. The Government of India, most unwisely as I think, told him that he ought to be greatly pleased at getting such nice letters, and supplied him with a sort of model form of reply.

Matters went on in this way till 1873, when a fresh wave of excitement passed through Asia in consequence of the expedition to Khiva. Shere Ali was violently alarmed at this fresh stride of Russia. He predicted that Merv would be the next step. That the Turcomans driven out of the Oasis would take refuge in his dominions, and that the Russians would then follow in pursuit of them. Accordingly, on the 24th July, 1873, Lord Northbrook, the then Viceroy, telegraphed to the Duke of Argyll :—

“Amir of Cabul, alarmed at Russian progress, dissatisfied with general assurance, and anxious to know definitely how far he may rely on our help if invaded. I propose assuring him that if he unreservedly accepts and acts on our advice in all external relations, we will help him with money, arms, and troops, if necessary, to expel unprovoked invasion. We to be the judge of the necessity. Answer by telegraph quickly.”

This was the turning point of our relations with Afghanistan. The Amir's alarm was genuine and well founded. His anxiety to throw in his lot with us was hearty and sincere. It was evident that the Viceroy shared in his apprehension, and was willing to remove them. A simple unqualified answer, approving of the proposed assurance, would have saved us the Afghan war. But it was not to be. The glamour of Russian diplomacy was still blinding the eyes of our statesmen. The Duke of Argyll could not understand how a barbarian like Shere Ali could have the impertinence to be more clear-sighted than himself. The sooner such

self-sufficiency was snubbed the better. So the answer came back :—

“ Cabinet thinks you should inform Amir that we do not at all share his alarm, and consider there is no cause for it; but you may assure him we shall maintain our settled policy in favour of Afghanistan, if he abides by our advice in external affairs.”

The plain English of this was, “ Shere Ali is a nervous fool. Who is he to set himself up for being wiser than we are? Tell him to be thankful for being as well off as he is.”

The result of these directions was, that when the Ameer's envoy, Syad Nur Mahomed, met the Viceroy at Simla, the latter came prepared to pledge himself to as little that was definite as might be.

Now, Shere Ali's position was this: He was bound by a treaty made by his father with the East India Company, by which Dost Mahomed had pledged himself to be the friend of the friends and the enemy of the enemies of the East India Company, but they had entered into no corresponding pledge to him. This, as he had stated to Lord Mayo in 1869, was a one-sided treaty. He foresaw that the time might come when he would find himself presented with a choice between being the friend or enemy of Russia. He was naturally anxious to secure a formal pledge that if he became the enemy of Russia he would be certain of finding a friend in England. But this pledge was exactly what Lord Northbrook was unable or unwilling to give. In the first interview with the Envoy, “ His Excellency the Viceroy observed that if, in the event of any aggression from without, British influence were invoked, and failed to effect a satisfactory settlement, it was probable that the British Government would in that case afford the Ruler of Afghanistan material assistance in repelling an invader. Such assistance would of course be conditional on the Amir following the advice of the British Government, and having himself abstained from aggression.” As the Amir wanted certainty and not probability, this declaration was hardly worth going the whole way to Simla to get. At the next meeting the Viceroy seems to have given the same assurance in a more positive

form. The probability was left out ; but the conditions precedent were reiterated and enforced. It was also stated that "the British Government holds itself perfectly free to decide as to the occasion when such assistance should be rendered, and also as to its nature and extent."

Then the Envoy, who seems to have acted with the greatest fairness, put two questions point blank.

"He requested in the first place, that in the event of any aggression in the Ameer's territories, the British Government would distinctly state that they would consider such aggressor as an enemy."

"His Excellency said that in diplomatic correspondence such expressions were always avoided as causing needless irritation. In His Excellency's opinion the assurance above given should be sufficient to satisfy the Amir as to the light in which any aggression would be considered by the British Government."

"Next, the Envoy pressed that the contingency of aggression by Russia should be specially mentioned in the written assurance to be given to the Amir."

"To this His Excellency replied that, setting aside the inexpediency of causing needless irritation to a friendly Power by such specific mention, the suggestion was one that could not be adopted, inasmuch as it implied an admission of the probability of such a contingency arising, which the British Government are not prepared to admit in the face of the repeated assurances given by Russia."

In the final letter sent by the Viceroy to Shere Ali this subject was disposed of as follows :—

"I have had some conversations with your Envoy on the subject of the policy which the British Government would pursue in the event of an attack upon your Highness' territories. A copy of the record of these conversations is attached to this letter. But the question is in my opinion one of such importance that it should be postponed to a more suitable opportunity."

Did anyone, since the days of Festus, ever hear that the importance of a subject was a reason for putting it aside till a more convenient season ?

So the bewildered Envoy returned to Cabul, there to lay before his master "the record of these conversations."

Now, this record undoubtedly displays some very pretty and delicate practice in fencing with words. The thrusts of the Envoy were parried with infinite dexterity. The whole thing was admirably calculated to gratify the Duke of Argyll and to read well in a Blue Book. It was probably much applauded in the India Office, and freely chuckled over at St. Petersburg. But when we ask how it was likely to serve the interests of the British Empire the answer is rather different.

I think it may be admitted that Lord Northbrook was really prepared on an emergency to do everything for Shere Ali that the Amir had a right to ask. I think it is even probable that he thought he was conveying to Shere Ali an adequate assurance that he was prepared to do so. But he overlooked two things: first, that Shere Ali was in a position to give something, and was entitled to ask something in exchange; secondly, that he would certainly read the words in one sense, while the Viceroy used them in another.

Shere Ali stood between two possible enemies, to either of whom he might be an absolute invaluable friend. Before deciding to which side he should offer his friendship, he was entitled to ascertain which of the two would offer him an ungrudging and absolute friendship in return. Lord Northbrook obviously supposed that the favour was all on his own side, that the Amir was bargaining for future assistance, to which he might affix his own terms. He never contemplated the event which has actually happened, in which the Afghan, by simply placing his territory at the disposal of Russia, might inflict incalculable injury on India. Had he done so, he would probably have hesitated before he dismissed the messenger of peace in the hope of finding him return "at a more suitable opportunity."

In the next place Lord Northbrook displayed a woeful ignorance of Oriental nature. A native will give the most implicit confidence to any English gentleman who speaks to him frankly and plainly. He will take our yea and nay as absolute truth. But when, from the purest desire not to overstate our intentions, we begin to qualify

and limit our answers, he looks upon our qualifications as quibbles and our limitations as lies. He judges others by himself. If Shere Ali had used to the Viceroy the Viceroy's language to himself, he would have meant to get out of his promises whenever it suited himself. And there can be no doubt this was the view he took of the cautious language that was used to his Envoy.

Three year's later, when Lord Lytton was attempting to enter into direct communications with the Amir, our agent stated his opinion to him, that Shere Ali "would be glad to come to our terms if he were once convinced of our meaning real business; but that we must be clear and open in our communications, as the Afghans have come to suspect a second meaning in all we utter." This could only have had reference to the impression produced on the Amir's mind by the Simla negotiations.

The effect of the interview upon the Amir is beyond doubt. He returned an an answer which, for cool insolence, probably surpassed anything that had ever reached the Foreign Department at Calcutta. He thanked God "that such security has been established in all countries that no aggressions will take place, nor will any power raise discussions or disputes within the dominions of that power; and that the use of inimical expressions has been discontinued in diplomatic correspondence, and that peace and tranquillity have been secured to the whole world." He then remarked, in substance, that under the circumstances Syad Nur Mahomed had taken a great deal of unnecessary trouble in going to Simla.

Evidently the "suitable opportunity" was not likely to recur. It never did. Upon this point Yakub Khan's evidence is conclusive. He said to General Roberts last year: "In 1869 my father was fully prepared to throw in his lot with you. He had suffered many reverses before making himself secure on the throne of Afghanistan; and he had come to the conclusion that his best chance of holding what he had won lay in an alliance with the British Government. He did not receive from Lord Mayo as large a supply of arms and ammunition as he had hoped, but nevertheless he returned to

Cabul fairly satisfied, and so he remained until the visit of Nur Mahomed to India in 1873. This visit brought matters to a head. The diaries received from Nur Mahomed during his stay in India, and the report which he brought back on his return, convinced my father that he could no longer hope to obtain from the British Government all the aid that he wanted; and from that time he began to turn his attention to the thoughts of a Russian alliance. You know how this ended."

I think we shall not be far wrong in dating the Afghan War back to the Duke of Argyll's telegram.

The interchange of letters between Shere Ali and the authorities at Tashkend now continued and became more frequent, and the Amir gradually ceased to forward such letters to the Indian Government or to consult them upon his replies. In 1875 Envoys began to arrive from General Kaufmann, and in 1876 they became so numerous that the Government of India requested the Foreign Office to complain of the proceeding as a direct violation of the understanding arrived at in 1869. The manner in which the complaint was met was characteristic of Russian diplomacy, whose great principle appears to be, not to let its right hand know what its left hand is doing. Prince Gortschakoff telegraphed to Count Schouvaloff desiring him to give a flat contradiction to the statement that General Kaufmann had been interfering at Cabul either by an agent or in any other manner. General Kaufmann put his hand to his heart, and appealed indignantly to his general character as shielding him from such an accusation. He asserted that his relations with Shere Ali had been limited to changes of civility, and that he had never sent to Cabul either agents or even a single messenger. His letters had only been matters of pure courtesy, and had been forwarded through the Amir of Bokhara, once or twice a year. This explanation was met by the Indian Government with a simple contradiction. The letters, many of which were forthcoming, spoke for themselves. They said of their number, "During the past year they have been incessant.

The bearers of them are regarded by the Amir as agents of the Russian Government, and on one pretext or another some person recognized by the Afghan Government as a Russian agent is now almost constantly at Cabul." It certainly confirms this view that Shere Ali, in acknowledging one of these letters from General Kaufmann, speaks of it as having been received "by hand of your Envoy Aishan Khwaja Bazurg." It is now well known that a mass of correspondence has been found in Cabul shewing dealings between the Amir and the Russians of a much more intimate character than had previously been suspected. All that is publicly known of these papers as yet is that the Government considers that they cannot safely be published.

It is now time to take up that series of events which culminated in the final refusal of Shere Ali to receive a British Embassy, and in the consequent declaration of war.

In January, 1875, Lord Salisbury wrote to the Government of India pointing out the comparative uselessness of the Native Agent at Cabul, and instructing them to take measures for procuring the assent of the Amir to the establishment of a British Agency at Herat, to be subsequently followed by a similar agency at Kandahar. No agency was suggested at Cabul. This despatch was answered on the 7th June, by an elaborate reply, in which the Government of India stated their objections to the course proposed. Their principal argument was that the Amir would either refuse the proffered agency, or accept it with great reluctance. Lord Salisbury pressed his views again upon the Government of India in November, 1875, and Lord Northbrook again renewed his objections in January, 1876. In the latter despatch he says: "We fully appreciate the force of the considerations referred to in your lordship's despatch, which render it conceivable that circumstances may occur, as they have occurred before, to draw the Russian Government into a line of action contrary to their real intentions and wishes. At present, however, we are in possession of no information which leads us to look upon Russian interference in Afghanistan as a probable or near contingency, or to anticipate that the Russian

Government will deviate from the policy of non-extension so recently declared."

It is difficult to imagine a franker confession of ignorance than this, or one which more fully shows the necessity for such an agency as Lord Salisbury had desired. As to the objection founded on Shere Ali's unwillingness to receive a British Agent, it is very probable that, in his existing state of feeling he would have objected. But in 1875, the Eastern Question had not been opened up. The advances of Russia to Shere Ali were being cautiously made in preparation for a crisis which had not arrived; and it is probable that if the matter had been strongly pressed upon him, the Russians would not have counselled an open resistance. Had he yielded at that time, the result might have been to check the intrigue which finally lured him to his ruin. Difficulties there were, no doubt. But the result showed that to postpone a difficulty is not to overcome it. He who shrinks from encountering the cub may have to fight the lion.

The next steps in the matter were taken by Lord Lytton who succeeded Lord Northbrook, as Viceroy, early in 1876. They extended over several months, and may be stated briefly as possible.

A messenger was sent to Shere Ali asking him to receive a special British Mission at Cabul. The ostensible object of the Mission was to make a formal communication of the arrival of the New Viceroy, and of Her Majesty's assumption of the title of Empress of India. The substantial object, however, was to bring about a renewal of the discussions of 1869 and 1873. Shere Ali refused to receive the Mission, but offered to depute the British Agent at Cabul, or a special agent of his own, to learn the proposals of the Government. The British Agent accordingly arrived, and was sent back with the offer of an alliance substantially the same as that which the Amir had sought for in 1873. It was made conditional, however, on his declining all communications with Russia, receiving British Agents at Herat and on the frontier, though not at Cabul, receiving special missions when desired, and deputing an Envoy to the Viceroy's head-quarters. A considerable delay followed before the Amir

would receive or discuss this communication. At length he sent an Envoy of his own who reached Pe-hawur in the end of January, 1877, and was there met on behalf of the Government of India by Sir Lewis Pelly. It appeared at once that he had no authority to negotiate on the basis that was offered. He remained, however, a considerable time at Peshawur, stating at great length the grievances of his master, and at last died. A fresh envoy was on his way from Cabul, who it was reported had authority eventually to accede to the British demands. But in the meantime the Viceroy had received intelligence of the growing hostility of Sheer Ali, of his massing his troops in the British frontier, preaching a religious war, tampering with the border tribes, and seeking to make alliances with the neighbouring chiefs. An alliance which involved large gifts of money and arms to one who was already almost our foe, was a thing not to be pressed forward, and Lord Lytton put an end to the negotiations.

It would be unnecessary to say anything more about a transaction which came to nothing, but that a vigorous attempt has been made to represent the hostility of Shere Ali as dating from Lord Lytton's Viceroyalty, and as arising, first from our establishing a British force at Quettah, and secondly from the attempt to thrust a British Embassy upon him in violation of an express pledge, supposed to have been given by Lord Mayo in 1869, that no such Embassy should be sent.

As to the first assertion, the facts are these:—

Quettah is at the head of the Bolan Pass, which is the principal approach to Afghanistan from Bombay. It is not in Afghan territory at all, but belongs to the Khan of Khelat. By a treaty of 1854 between the British Government and the Khan of Khelat we were authorized to occupy it whenever we liked. In 1876 it was occupied pending arrangements for the settlement of dissensions in Khelat itself, and the occupation was made permanent in 1877, partly on account of the beneficial effect it had had upon Khelat, and partly with a view to eventualities in Afghanistan. Even if Shere Ali had been dissatisfied with the measure, this was no reason why

we should not have taken a step of the first importance to ourselves, which we were entitled to take by treaty. But there is in fact no evidence that it was considered a real grievance by the Amir. Our agent stated indeed that he had taken umbrage at these proceedings, because he regarded Khelat as forming a part of the Afghan State since the days of Ahmed Shah, but he admitted that this was a sentimental grievance, and not seriously urged.

As to the second point, the only foundation for the idea that any such pledge was given, is a statement to that effect contained in a private letter from Lord Mayo to the Duke of Argyll. The public and official records of the Umballah Conference, and the discussions connected with it, show that no such pledge was given. Before Shere Ali left his own dominions he held a sort of Cabinet Council at Cabul, in which the propriety of admitting British Agents was discussed. He stated his own opinion to be that European Agents should not be received at Cabul, but that there would be no objection to their being located at Candahar, Balkh, or Herat. This view was assented to by all present. The same view was put forward in conversation at Umballah by his Minister. No formal proposal to send any such agents was made by Lord Mayo in 1869, and the matter was evidently considered one which did not press for a decision. In the discussion which took place during Lord Lytton's Viceroyalty, Shere Ali never put forward any pledge by Lord Mayo as a reason for not receiving an Embassy. He stated several grounds of objection, one of which was that if he received an English Envoy he would also have to receive a Russian Envoy. The plea which is set up for him by his English defenders appears never to have entered his mind.

We now come to the third and final stage of the matter in 1878. In the beginning of that year the war between Russia and Turkey came to an end, and then followed a period of several months during which it seemed probable that it would be followed by a war between Russia and England.

On the 26th May, 1878, an official order appeared in the

Turkestan Gazette for the formation of three expeditionary detachments whose lines of march were given. They all formed a concentrated movement in Afghanistan. And while the Congress at Berlin was sitting, Russian troops were steadily advancing to the frontiers of India. At the same time the news letters from Afghanistan teemed with accounts of the arrival, actual or expected, of Russian envoys of high military rank. On the 18th June, the Peshawar agent informed our Government that the Russian Envoy at Cabul had laid before the Amir certain proposals, which he sent in full. They contained amongst other things, requests that the Amir should allow Russian troops to be stationed in four places in the boundaries of Afghanistan, and give them passage and supplies on their way to India.

Leave was to be given to Russia to construct telegraphs and roads through Afghanistan. An alliance offensive and defensive was to be made between the two States. In short, the resources of Afghanistan were to be placed for all purposes of attack against England at the service of Russia.

In the end of July the Russian General Stoletoff, with his retinue, arrived in Cabul, and they were received by the Amir with every mark of honour and confidence.

These proceedings were discussed triumphantly by the Russian journals, and six days after the signature of the Treaty of Berlin, the *Moscow Gazette* referred to them in these words:—“The time has arrived for Russia to establish her influence over the whole of Central Asia, and this is all the more easy as the Ruler of Afghanistan is not on good terms with England—our foe in Central Asia. The concentration of our influence on the frontiers of the territory of the Empress of India would be only a natural answer to the English seizure of Cyprus and all the approaches to Asia. Such may be the unobtrusive, though peaceable object of the military operations undertaken by the troops of the Turkestan military circuit, as our correspondent at Berlin truly remarked the other day:—‘In Asia there are two political powers confronting each other, and they must inevitably come into collision.’ England wishes to be Russia’s nearest neighbour in Asia Minor; and it is only natural, therefore,

that Russia, in her turn, should desire to approach somewhat nearer to the English frontiers in India."

It has never been clearly known how far the Russian forces proceeded, but it is stated that they were recalled after the signature of the Treaty of Berlin. The Russian Embassy, however, remained in Cabul long after the conclusion of the treaty was known, and did not finally leave until Shere Ali's departure from Afghanistan.

It was clearly impossible for the British Government to allow Shere Ali to receive a Russian Embassy, and refuse one from England. Accordingly on the 14th August, 1878, the Government wrote informing the Amir of their intention to send Sir Neville Chamberlain to him, upon a special mission. The letter was sent by a Native Envoy, and reached Cabul in the middle of September. The answers he received from the Amir and his Ministers were evasive and procrastinating, and he wrote that he suspected that the coming of the English Mission was impossible, so long as the Russians were there. The real facts of the case, however, as to the rejection of the English Mission are now known from two independent sources. A letter from Cabul, dated the 13th October, and addressed to the Russian paper, *The Golcs*, says, "The Amir had asked General Stolietoff for advice regarding the reception of the British Mission. General Stolietoff replied in an evasive manner, but gave the Amir to understand that the simultaneous presence of Embassies of two countries which were almost in hostile relations, would be inconvenient. The Amir then decided to refuse admission to the English Mission."

The account Yakoob Khan gave to General Roberts is to the same effect. He said, "When my father received from the Government of India the letter informing him that a British Mission was about to proceed to Cabul, he read it out in Durbar. The members of the Russian Embassy were present. After the reading was finished, Colonel Stolietoff rose, saluted the Amir, and asked permission to leave Cabul. If permitted, he would, he said, travel to Tashkend without delay and report the state of affairs to General Kaufmann,

who would inform the Czar, and thus bring pressure to bear upon England. He promised to return in six weeks or two months, and urged the Amir meanwhile to do everything in his power to prevent the British Mission from reaching Cabul." This gets rid of all the argumentation which was used in the end of 1878, to the effect that the Amir would have been willing to receive the mission, if we had not flurried him by our indecent haste to force ourselves into his presence.

On the 21st September the mission reached the Afghan outpost, and Major Cavagnari rode on to know what reception it would meet. The officer in command informed him that he was prepared to resist the passage of the Envoy by force. An ultimatum, demanding an apology and full satisfaction was then sent, but also without effect. And then the British Government had to decide the question, what was to be done?

There could be no doubt that technically this insolent refusal to receive an Embassy was in itself a ground of war. If when relations were strained between Germany and Russia, we were to *fête* the German Ambassador, and send word to St. Petersburg that the Russian Ambassador would not be received at court, and would be shot if he tried to land at Dover pier, there can be very little doubt that a declaration of war would follow as fast as a messenger could bring it. But Shere Ali did more than this. He reversed to our detriment the whole policy of an Indian Empire. Both Liberals and Conservatives had laid down as the cardinal point of our policy that Afghanistan should be friendly and independent, and that for that purpose it should be kept free from all Russian interference, direct or indirect. This policy had been communicated to Shere Ali, and assented to by him. To further it he had asked for and received money and arms, and, what was of far more value, he had had the displeasure of the British Government threatened to his rivals. Yet without provocation, and to suit his own caprice, at a time when we were threatened with war by Russia, he had introduced our rivals, who might at any moment become our enemies, to the weakest part of our Empire, and given them not merely the key of the door, but the door itself. The strictest

stickler for international law can hardly deny that such treachery might justly be punished by war. But I go further, and say that war was not only just but necessary. Suppose we had done nothing, and allowed the Russians to obtain the treaty they demanded, what would have been the result? The Amir's army would have been drilled and disciplined by skilful instructors. Military roads and telegraphs would have been constructed, the passes would have been fortified, an impregnable barrier would have been raised to bar our advance, while behind it intrigues could have been prosecuted, and invasion prepared with secrecy and safety. We are often told that a Russian invasion of India is an impossibility. I think it is, until Russia is in possession of Afghanistan or some similar point of departure. At present, owing to distance and want of transport, her forces would have to arrive in dribblets, and could be cut off in detail. But the gardens of Herat and the plains of Candahar would suffice for the gathering of an army, and every fragment would be in perfect safety till the whole was ready to swoop down from their heights. With such a vantage ground, however, invasion would be unnecessary. Russia would be the master of our destiny, and could afford to allow us to bleed slowly to death. Stationed in Afghanistan her influence would be supreme in Persia, and she could annex as much of it as she required as marching ground for her army of the Caucasus. Our position in India would be revolutionised. Our Empire is girdled round by independent states, such as Beloochistan, Cashmere, Nepaul, and Burmah, who now willingly recognize our superiority. Within our frontiers are numerous feudatories; the unconquered Rajputs, who trace their ancestry from the sun; the great Mahratta States of Baroda, Gwalior, and Indore, who still pine over the memory of their former independence; the territory of the Nizam, whose wild Arab mercenaries are with difficulty kept in order by Sir Salar Jung. All of these are now at peace, because we are stronger than they, and because they know none as strong as ourselves. But when Afghanistan was once mediatised by Russia, Beloochistan, Cashmere, Nepaul, and perhaps even Burmah, would soon have

Russian Ambassadors to direct their Courts, and Russian Generals to drill their armies. We should be surrounded by a ring of fire. Every feudal Court would be a centre for intrigue, and the Foreign Office on the Neva would be a Court of Appeal from the India Office on the Thames. The whole tone of our Government would have to change. Distrust and coercion would take the place of confidence and liberty. The Native States which at present are wholesome centres of National life, would have to be sternly disarmed and perhaps absorbed. The perpetual peace which now reigns from the Himalayas to Ceylon would be replaced by suspicion and strife. By the time rebellion had been suppressed, and a dead level of depression and discontent had been attained, the debt of India would have been doubled; taxation would have been increased, and the railways and works of irrigation would have been checked. The dark Northern cloud alone would still remain. We should be compelled to maintain along the Indus alone a European Army larger than is now sufficient for the whole of India. Even without war we should find a creeping paralysis spreading over us in the East. Our influence in Europe would disappear, for we should have become helpless in the presence of Russia, or any nation with whom Russia was allied. At the slightest rumour of war we should have to draft all our available forces to the Punjab.

The present war has, no doubt, brought us dangers and difficulties, but they are nothing to the dangers and difficulties which would have followed from doing nothing. I have never yet met anyone who could say what they would have done except go to war. The only other suggestion I have ever heard is, that our real cause of offence was with Russia, and that it was unmanly to attack a weak power, when we were afraid to attack a strong one. This is the sort of argument that raises a roar among a mob, but is hardly adapted to rational beings. If war is an evil, the smaller the war the smaller the evil. Do those who declaim against the war in Afghanistan really think that we ought to have commenced a war with Russia, which would have wrapped the whole of Europe in flames? or that when

we wanted to strengthen our position in the Khyber Pass the wisest way was to commence operations in the Baltic and the Black Sea? If they mean anything, they must mean that we should have applied diplomatic pressure to Russia to withdraw its Embassy. This is exactly what we did, and the pressure was successful, because we had previously made the position of the Embassy untenable. But if we had resorted to diplomacy at St. Petersburg alone, we must have admitted that as against Shere Ali we had no ground of complaint. He, therefore, would have maintained his position, that he had a right to exclude us and to receive Russia. But if he had a right to receive Russia, it is difficult to see why Russia had not a right to be received. At all events at a crisis of European negotiations, when our weight was essential in the interests of peace, we should have been involved in a fresh litigation with Russia, and forced to stand ready at any moment for a great war. In the end Russia would probably have withdrawn her Embassy to return again when wanted, but she would have left behind her consuls, her engineers, and her officers. She would have established the point that she could break treaties when and how she liked, and that she could protect others in doing the same. A war might have been avoided, but our position in the East would have perished. The Queen of England might still call herself Empress of India, but the real Emperor would be the Czar of Russia.

With all its losses and outlay I believe the Afghan war has been a great success. It has maintained our influence in Europe, and exalted it in Asia. It has shown the nations who surround our Indian Empire that we are not afraid to strike, even though the great Colossus of the North stands behind our foe. Russia has been publicly seen to tempt a friend to his ruin, and then to leave him to his fate. The voices which accused us of decrepitude are silenced. The loyalty of our feudatories has been quickened and refreshed, for they are proud to serve a master whom they can respect as well as fear. Perhaps before long even the Afghans may learn that submission to law is the first step to liberty.

J. D. M.



